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Accelerating time to benefit: Deconstructing innovative organizational practices in five projects

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Abstract

Despite the ubiquitous pressure for speed, our approaches to accelerate projects remain constrained to the old-fashioned understanding of the project as a vehicle to deliver products and services, not value. This article explores an attempt to accelerate time to benefit. We describe and deconstruct the implementation of a large intervention undertaken in five project-based organizations in Denmark – the Project Half Double where the same project methodology has been applied in five projects, each of them in five distinct organizations in Denmark, as a bold attempt to realize double the benefit in half of the time. Although all cases valued speed and speed to benefit, and implemented most practices proposed by the methodology, only three of the five projects were more successful in decreasing time to speed. Based on a multi-case study comparison between these five different projects and their respective organizations, we propose five complementary explanations for the different results.

Introduction

We live in an accelerating society. Speed matters not only to the economy, but also to how we function as a society (Rosa, 2013). As Rosa argues, "*modernization is not only a multileveled process in time but also signifies first and foremost a structural (and culturally highly significant) transformation of time structures and horizons themselves*" (Rosa, 2013, p. 4). Projects embody the need for an increasing speed of delivery. Unlike other organizational forms, projects are inherently transitory, entangled in time and coordinated through deadlines (Dille & Söderlund, 2011; Lindkvist, Soderlund, & Tell, 1998). Projects are made to die, and suffer strong pressures to finish as soon as possible. Thus, speed matters to projects, and projects are instrumental to achieve higher speed. Not surprisingly, projects appear to be a particularly well suited form of organizing, so much so that commentators argue that we live in a Project Society (Jensen, Thuesen, & Geraldi, 2016).

However, the relationship between projects and time (and speed) builds on an uncomfortable oxymoron: *temporary* projects exist to build *lasting* legacy (as quickly as possible!). Projects are a projection, they exist to create a new future, and thereby generate long-term benefits. At the same time, in the very temporal space offered by projects lies also the seeds for short-term thinking (Brown

& Eisenhardt, 1997). As Clegg and Baumeler (2010) argue, project work manifests Bauman's Liquid Modernity (Bauman, 2000) in organizational life, where "*long-term thinking and planning will be increasingly surrendered to the moment*." (Bauman, 2000, p. 1728). A consequence is that the short-term orientation challenges realization of strategic benefits after project completion (Atkinson, 1999; Maylor, Brady, Cooke-Davies, & Hodgson, 2006). How can it be that projects exist to create value, yet their temporal morphology hinders their ability to do so?

A short-handed explanation is that while it is widely accepted that projects exist to create benefits in the future, it was only in the last decade that benefit realization management (BRM) and benefit realization was emphasized where it received attention from academics (Breese, 2012; Laursen & Svejvig, 2016) and practitioners (Bradley, 2010). Value creation is furthermore one of the five directions from the rethinking project management network to go from "*product creation as prime focus*" to "*value creation as prime focus*" (Winter, Smith, Morris, & Cicmil, 2006, p. 642). There has thus been an increasing focus on value creation instead of product creation, but at the same time, we have seen the agile project management go from strength to strength in both practice and academia (Tripp, Riemenschneider, & Thatcher, 2016; West, Grant, Gerush, & D'silva, 2010) where agile projects focus on a high degree of customer interaction and frequent deliveries (Edivandro Carlos Conforto, Amaral, da Silva, Di Felippo, & Kamikawachi, 2016). However, agile project management lacks the focus on value creation as it is seen within BRM, which calls for studies that combine agile thinking and BRM.

Focus on benefit requires a paradigm shift in our understanding of projects and the project management process as a value creation process where customers and clients play a more fundamental role. Engagement with customers, the iterative process of developing requirement etc. leads invariably to longer lead times. The key argument has been that longer developmental cycles are justifiable, as what is created is valued and provides more benefits to key stakeholders. Hence, from this perspective, we accepted that the process is rather messy and time consuming, and hence, projects will allow either rapid or frugal delivery, that is, we can be quick, or we can deliver benefit. However, even if we accept that, focusing a project on value creation does not dissolve its tendency for short-termism nor its pressures for speed, and thus only addresses part of the oxymoron.

This article puts forth an alternative explanation and investigates a bold attempt to dissolve this oxymoron in practice. At the heart of our argument is time to benefit. Project scholars and practitioners are well acquainted with myriad practices to manage time, such as critical path and the possibilities to 'crash' schedules. However, these practices build on deterministic and linear assumptions about projects. They provide limited value to accelerate more complex and uncertain (and common) projects, where and when scope is in constant development in collaboration with sponsors, users and other key stakeholders. One thing is to have a prime focus on value; another is to get value faster, which appears to be overlooked in discussions about value creation and benefit realization management.

This paper explores a project methodology that aims to speed not the time for delivery but time to benefit. In doing so, it attacks the core of the proposed oxymoron by connecting lasting legacy (benefit) to temporality (speed). Specifically, our study analyzes 'real life' interventions across five real life projects, changing and speeding up the benefit realization of their projects using the same methodology to speed up, and hence allows us to see the impact of the methodology in the ways of speeding up the project across industries and organizational context. As expected, some projects were more successful in speeding time to benefit than others. This paper asks why some projects achieved benefits faster than others did. And based on the comparison between the cases, we

propose propositions to explain the acceleration of time to benefit specifically, and the relationship between projects, time and legacy in general.

The research methodology in this paper is engaged scholarship where we co-produce knowledge with practitioners and are engaged in intervention (Van de Ven 2007). We frame the specific approach in this paper as action design research (Sein, Henfridsson, Purao, Rossi, & Lindgren, 2011).

The following sections will analyze the implementation of the Half Double Methodology. The next two sections describe the project management methodology and the overall research settings, including a description of the development of the methodology over time. They will build the context and backbone for the analysis of the cases. We then provide an overview of the different cases and an analysis of their achievements in terms of reducing time to speed. Subsequently, the cases are analyzed based on comparing and contrasting those which increased speed and those which did not. The article is completed with discussions and conclusion.

Research Setting and Research Methodology

The Project Half Double initiative started in 2013 as an informal network from Danish industry who discussed how to develop project management in the light of the apparent high failure rate of projects (e.g. CHAOS Reports (Hastie & Wojewoda, 2015; Standish Group, 2015)), and with the ambition to manage projects in a radically different way. The initiative was centered on "Implement Consulting Group" (hereafter Implement), a Scandinavian-based management consultancy company. The initiative matured and gradually began to formalize during spring 2014 – the initiative was at that time called "Project 2.0." The work manifested into 10 leading stars and other foundational material based on lean and agile thinking. The Danish Industry Foundation, an independent philanthropic foundation, funded the project with 13.8 million Danish kroner (1.9 million euros) from spring 2015. The project was renamed Project Half Double (PHD) as this reflected the high ambition of the project stated as follows:

> "*Projects in half the time with double impact*" and "*Together we will develop a new and radical project paradigm to increase the competitiveness of the Danish industry*."

Projects in half the time should be understood as half the time to impact (benefit realization, effect is achieved) and not as half the time for project execution.

The project kick-off took place in June 2015 with the intention to apply the methodology to seven pilot projects.

The 10 leading stars served as a good starting point for the PHD project, but they were difficult to communicate and apply efficiently in project settings, and were in spring 2016 operationalized into the *Half Double Methodology* (Svejvig et al., 2016).

Five out of the seven projects were completed in 2016 while two projects are still ongoing although some of the projects are input to another project.

In general, the research can be labeled as engaged scholarship where we co-produce knowledge with practitioners and are engaged in intervention (Van de Ven, 2007), and the more specific approach is action design research (ADR) (Sein et al., 2011). The ADR process can be divided into a problem-solving cycle and a research cycle (Mathiassen, Chiasson, & Germonprez, 2012). The problem solving cycle is executed by the Implement consultants applying the Half Double Methodology in the case organizations in order to improve the pilot projects. The research cycle is

carried out in parallel with the pilot projects with the purpose: (1) to evaluate and compare the pilot project with other projects in the same organization (Svejvig & Hedegaard, 2016) and (2) to learn from the pilot projects.

The research team has met with the seven organizations some 5-10 times at workshops and interviews supplemented by relevant project documentation (Myers, 2009). This was used to make write-ups for each pilot project. We have furthermore had dedicated pilot project evaluation workshops in April – May 2016 and follow-up interviews in December 2016 and January 2017 in order to capture learnings from the pilot projects. We decided to omit two of the seven cases from this study because of lack of data.

The data analysis followed the interpretive tradition (Walsham, 2006) using hermeneutics (Myers, 2009), we used an inductive approach to the coding process (Charmaz, 2014). We constructed 28 codes organized into six categories (see Appendix A) based on several readings of the findings from the project (Svejvig et al., 2016), PowerPoint presentations from evaluations workshops etc. and finally listening to digital recordings from the many meetings and workshops. NVivo (Bazeley, 2007) supported the data management and coding process, and a number of themes emerged from this process such as “Valuing speed” and “Institutional clashes and context”. We furthermore performed a query of our NVivo data in order to capture the frequency of words, which was also used in our analysis (see Appendix B).

This paper builds on and extends earlier studies about Project Half Double (Heeager, Svejvig, & Schlichter, 2016; Svejvig et al., 2016; Svejvig & Grex, 2016; Svejvig & Hedegaard, 2016).

Description of Half Double Methodology

Below in Figure 1 is a very brief description of the Half Double Methodology in order to present the main elements of the methodology:

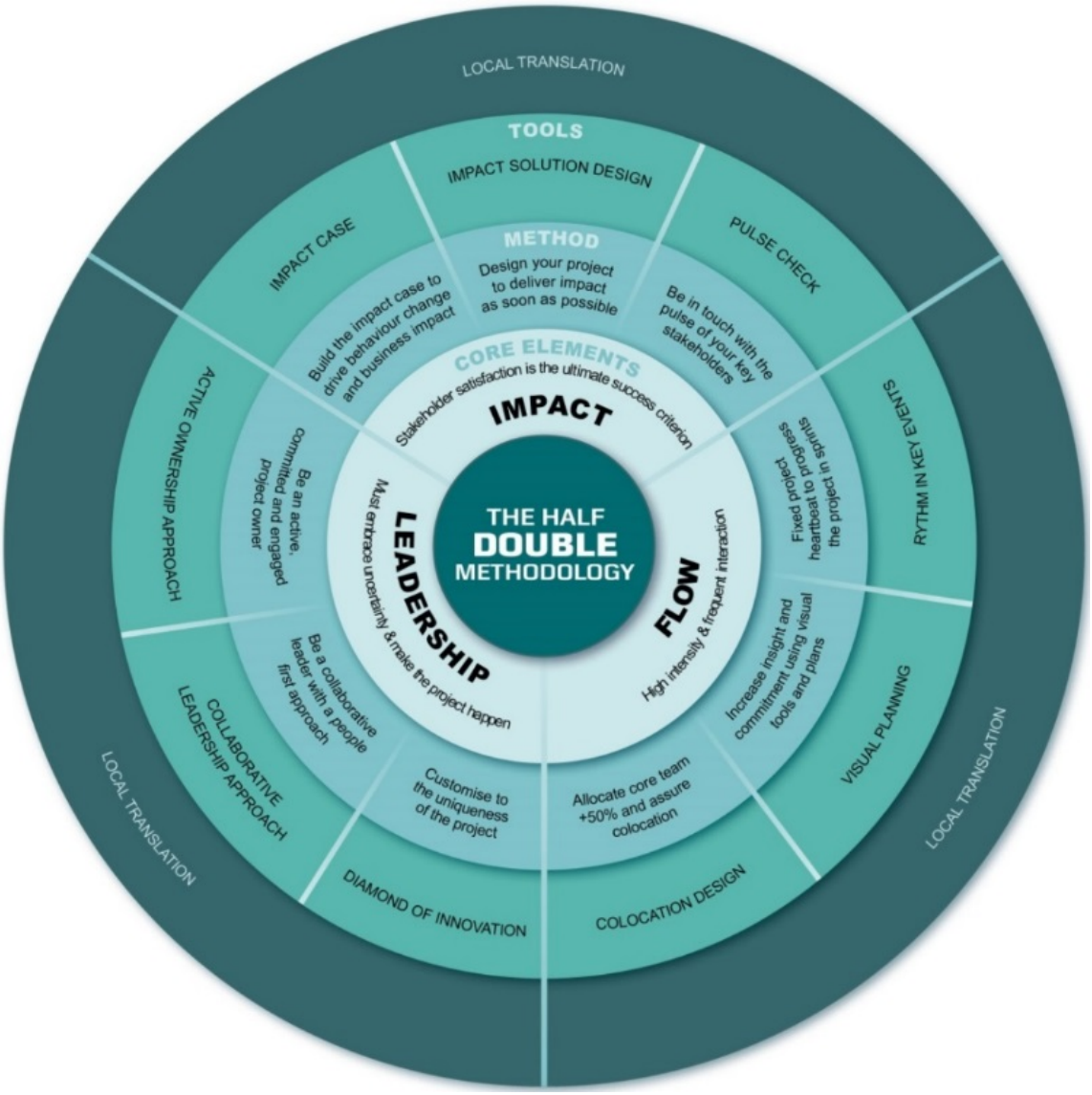

Figure 1: The Half Double Methodology

Figure 1 expresses the focus on impact, flow and leadership which has been pursued in all pilot projects. The Half Double Methodology is an add-on to existing project management methodologies and governance structures in organizations. The methodology is further described at a website www.projecthalfdouble.dk and in Svejvig et al. (2016).

Overview of Cases

The characteristics of five cases selected for the study in this paper are described below in Table 1 as well as the Half Double achievements:

Company Characteristics	Pilot Project Characteristics (as of January 2017)	Half Double achievements (as of January 2017)
Lantmännen Unibake • Foodservice industry • Size: 6,000 employees	• *Project type*: Market and product development project (bread concept for stores) • *Current status*: Completed and fully operational • *Project governance*: Not so mature	The Lantmännen Unibake pilot project was able to launch the first stores after 5 months, which is considerably shorter lead time than comparable reference projects, which have had a lead time of 10 months or more. Furthermore, the sales potential was realized in the project execution and with an average pulse check satisfaction of 3.3 on a scale from 1 to 5.
Novo Nordisk • Global healthcare company • Size: 41,600 employees	• *Project type*: IT Project (Supply Chain) • *Current status*: Completed and fully operational • *Project governance*: Highly mature with strict governance and project models	The Novo Nordisk pilot project has reduced time to impact considerably by changing go live from February 2017 to June and September 2016, which is faster than comparable reference projects. A new approach to variant planning has been implemented with success.
GN Audio • Professional & consumer audio solutions company • Size: 1,000 employees	• *Project type*: E-commerce project (channels for online marketing and sales) • *Current status*: Completed but not fully in operation (part of launching has been postponed) • *Project governance:* Some governance structures implemented	The GN Audio pilot project has a slightly reduced lead time compared to comparable reference projects, but the quality of the deliverables in terms of accuracy is higher on all dimensions for the pilot project (content accuracy, integration accuracy, pricing accuracy, and finally inventory accuracy).
Siemens Wind Power • A world-leading supplier of wind turbines • Size: 7,000 employees	• Engineering product development (Wind Turbine) • *Current status*: Is still going on (Implementation and final validation phase) • *Project governance:* Highly mature with strict governance and project models	The Siemens Wind Power pilot project has not been able to reduce time to impact, but to retain the planned lead time and retain the commercial value from the project. The project was awarded "Turbine of the Year"; a central contract of 100+ turbines was won.
Grundfos • The world's largest pump manufacturer • Size: 18,000 employees	• Engineering product development (new generation of pumps) • *Current status*: Completed and handed over to product development project • *Project governance:* Highly mature with strict governance and project models	The Grundfos pilot project has not quite been able to reduce time to impact, but has achieved other important results such as improving the transition readiness assessment from 63% to 87% and ensuring a relatively high level of stakeholder engagement.

Table 1: Overview of cases

Defining Impact in different cases

The Half Double Methodology is *impact* driven. The word impact itself is the second most frequent word in our empirical data (see appendix B), which indicates that the impact discussion has been high on the agenda across all cases, which is not a surprise as the methodology is about increasing impact. Impact in Project Half Double is not just about speeding up the project; rather it is about creating benefits. Across the five pilot cases benefits and impact are translated differently depending on the local context. For example in the Lantmännen Unibake case, benefits are focused on increased sales figures; whereas increased quality of the deliverables are in focus in both the Novo Nordisk and the GN Audio cases. This calls for a broad impact definition and different measures of impact from project to project.

Achieving impact of the intervention

Three cases had excellent results in terms of speeding time to benefit. When Lantmännen Unibake started their pilot project in August 2015, they had a clear goal to reduce "time to impact" by having 60% cross-functional team allocation. The results show that the "time to impact" was reduced from 10-15 months to 6 months when we compare with similar projects in the organization. Novo Nordisk was in the same situation where they reduced time to impact, as they changed the launch from February 2017 to September 2016 and still delivering the expected business impact and quality. Finally GN Audio pilot project has a slightly reduced lead time compared to comparable reference projects.

However, two cases did not achieve reduced time to impact although both projects certainly had the intention to do so. First, Grundfos had an intention to reduce time to market reducing from 9 to 6 months expecting to finish in April 2016, but they were not able to finish until June 2016, so there was no reduction in time. Second, Siemens Wind Power pursued to close design specification in order to complete a milestone in March 2016, but the actual completion took place in the summer of 2016.

As we can observe, the intervention was not equally successful across the five cases. In the next sections, we analyze why this is the case.

Data Analysis

Implementation of the Project Half Double Methodology

What we have noted across all cases is that there was a genuine attempt to implement Half Double Methodology, and most practices and methods have been applied. This is not to say that there were no difficulties in the application and that this was equally implemented across the different cases. This section explores the level of implementation of the Half Double Methodology.

Implementing projects as value creation approach

First, and for all, value creation approach and thinking (Laursen & Svejvig, 2016) is highly related to valuing speed and as such discussed in conjunction. By this, we mean that it both makes sense to talk about value creation and when to harvest the value (speed). The value creation approach was operationalized in the Half Double Methodology through two methods: "impact case" and "impact solution design". Impact case describes how "*to drive behavioral change and business impact*" while the impact solution design focuses on how to "*design your project to deliver impact as soon as possible with end users close to the solution*".

All five cases have been working intensely with an impact case. Two of the cases worked only with impact solution design due to the later introduction of impact solution design as method.

The application of impact cases is illustrated with examples in Table 2 below:

Pilot project (case)	Example of business impact	Example of behavioral impact
Grundfos	The front-loading phase from G2 to G3 is reduced from 9 to 6 months	A non-serviceable product is accepted by the customers
Siemens Wind Power	Break-even is achieved after launch of product after x years	Active project owner to engage with the project team on site monthly
Lantmännen Unibake	Turnover from the pilot project is achieved from April 2016 (already achieved from January 2016)	Lantmännen Unibake on customer X Top 10 list as an innovative and "trusted partner" - February 2016
Novo Nordisk	Reduced time for pilot project impact, where go-live time is accelerated from originally planned in February 2017 to September 2016. Go-live is further accelerated for part of the solution to June 2016	Increased planner job motivation
GN Audio	Launch of 26 marketplaces and two new channels with decreased complexity by 2017	Involvement of relevant project managers from initiation to launch

Table 2: Examples of business impact and behavioral impact from pilot projects

Table 2 shows that all cases have been working with the impact case and it has been a much more integrated part of the project work than typically seen in more classic approaches. PRINCE2 advises to prepare a business case in its initial stages and then do follow-up at each stage shift (Office of Government Commerce, 2009, p. 22) while PMBoK discusses the business case as part of the project charter prepared early in the project life cycle (Project Management Institute, 2013, pp. 65-68). This indicates the different value creation thinking behind more classical approaches and Half Double Methodology.

Implementation of the Half Double methods and practices

While 'impact' is one of the core elements of Half Double Methodology, there are several other methods and practices involved in the methodology which are more related to speeding up the process (flow) and providing the project with a fruitful leadership context. The identified methods and practices derive from codes with more than 10 references (see coding list in appendix A), most of the codes overlap with the Impact, Flow and Leadership methods in the Half Double Methodology. The inductive research into the implementation of the Half Double Methodology also reveals practices not included in the methodology as well as some practices not being found in a larger extent in the research material. Table 3 summarizes the practices used in the five pilot projects:

Methods and practices	Grundfos	Siemens Wind Power	Lantmännen Unibake	Novo Nordisk	GN Audio	Related core element
Frequent follow-up with pulse checks	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Impact
Co-location	Yes	Yes	Partly	Yes	Yes (virtually also)	Flow
Rhythm in project	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Flow
Sprint planning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Flow

Methods and practices	Grundfos	Siemens Wind Power	Lantmännen Unibake	Novo Nordisk	GN Audio	Related core element
Visualization	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Flow
Active project ownership	Partly	Partly	Partly	Yes	Yes	Leadership
Project leadership	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Resourcing	Partly	N/A	Partly	Partly	Yes	N/A

Table 3: Summary of practices applied in the pilot projects

Table 3 shows that nearly all methods and practices have been followed by all five cases except for active project ownership and resourcing. Having the right resources at the right time appears to be a general challenge including the five cases in spite of the extra focus that these pilot projects have received from the pilot organization. This could be expected, as availability of resources is a common problem in projects, as Cooper, Edgett, & Kleinschmidt (2000, p. 19) state "*too many projects, not enough resources*".

Active project ownership shows a more mixed picture where it has been achieved for Novo Nordisk and GN Audio while only partly by Lantmännen Unibake, Grundfos and Siemens Wind Power. This might be one of the explaining factors for the cases where they were able to reduce time to impact (Novo Nordisk and GN Audio). Lantmännen Unibake was able to achieve the intended results despite that active project ownership was only partial. Reasons might be that this part of the Lantmännen Unibake organization executing the pilot project is a local country organization, and a smaller organization with around 500 employees with a high commitment from project members to the pilot project, which might have compensated for the busy project owner.

The following statements underline the importance of active project ownership:

> *"Involvement and ownership from project owner and steering group is important and a big asset - dialog rather than control"* (Novo Nordisk meeting April 2016)

> "*The project owner has been deeply involved in the implementation of the Half Double Methodology. First and foremost in the frequency of his appearances in the colocation room; participation in status and sprint planning meetings – but also in the way the steering committee has been involved*" (GN Audio, phase 1 report June 2016)

While the following indicates the challenges at Lantmännen Unibake, Grundfos and Siemens Wind Power:

> "*Active project ownership and commitment is crucial for project success, and this has been a challenge for the pilot project because the project owner had multiple roles and simply was too busy*" (Lantmännen Unibake, phase 1 report June 2016)

> "*Wish for more project owner cooperation*" (Siemens Wind Power meeting March 2016)

> "*There was a desire to get the steering committee close to the project and participate in sprint finalization meetings (sprint review). One member of the steering committee attended at a few meetings*" (Grundfos, phase 1 report June 2016).

Active project ownership, or also usually termed top management support is generally assumed a critical success factor for projects (Hastie & Wojewoda, 2015) expressed as "*the pivotal role of the owner (or sponsor)*" although just one out of many 'critical success factors' including managing the front end, managing or influencing project context (Morris, 2013, p. 60). Thus, it is not surprising

that active project ownership turns out to be a relevant feature in the implementation of Half Double Methodology.

Valuing speed

We observed that achieving faster impact acted as a guiding rule throughout the intervention in all cases. A common pattern for Lantmännen Unibake, GN Audio and Novo Nordisk is that there has been high management attention from project owner and other stakeholders to get the things done and to allocate the needed resources. However, the project cases performed differently and led to different results.

Speed was a clear competitive advantage for GN Audio and Lantmännen Unibake. For example, GN Audio had a strong belief that "*Implementing a better way of launching new markets will generate faster business*". It intended to use the Half Double Methodology to be able to "*launch 26 marketplaces and two new channels with decreased complexity by 2017*" (GN Audio, kick-off presentation, March 2016).

Grundfos, in contrast, had no value from speeding up the project or its benefits. The reason was that there was no longer a need to finish the project early, as the next step in the product development process was not able to start until September 2016, and the allocation of resources was therefore attuned to this schedule balancing the project portfolio. The consequence was that the project was not sped up as originally planned just because it was not relevant.

Siemens Wind Power had a focus of speeding up the project by reducing the time to execute design and prototype phase. However, this project has seen several delays and setbacks, so instead of reducing time, the phase was extended, but the delay (and missed reduction of time) has not had any serious commercial impact due to market contingencies.

Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that valuing speed is relevant to actually speed up project and its generated impact, although the nature of the 'value' can vary from tangible operational costs, strategic advantages or overall marketing and even to peer pressure.

While the implementation of the practices itself is not very instrumental in terms of explaining the differences we observe across the different cases, other related aspects seem to provide more relevant cues.

Time of the introduction of the Half Double Methodology

The pilot projects are very different not least in duration (from 3 months to many years), and this means that the Half Double Methodology has been introduced at different points related to the project life cycle. In some projects, the methodology has been introduced in the very beginning (front end) (Lantmännen Unibake, Novo Nordisk and GN Audio). For the Siemens Wind Power pilot project was it introduced very late in the end of the design and prototyping phase, which meant that the direction of the project was more or less fixed, because there are many dependencies in such a large engineering project. The introduction of Half Double Methodology in the Grundfos pilot project was reasonable but due to project portfolio, decisions did not have the wanted impact.

Nature of the project

The nature of the project is relevant to take a closer look at when exploring the differences between the five pilot project cases and the differences in valuing speed. To map the nature of the project, elements like project type, duration, complexity and project characteristics are considered and shown in Table 4 below:

Pilot project (case)	Project type	Timeframe for project execution	Physical artefacts	Complexity
Grundfos	Product development	Long-term (9 months + preparation gates)	Yes	Indicated higher
Siemens Windpower	Product development	Long-term (33 months total)	Yes	Indicated higher
Lantmännen Unibake	Market and Product development	Medium-term (6 months)	Yes	Indicated lower
Novo Nordisk	IT project	Medium-term (6 months)	No	Indicated medium
GN Audio	E-commerce/IT project	Short-term (3 months)	No	Indicated lower

Table 4: Nature of the pilot projects

The table shows that the five cases represent different types of projects and time frames as well as whether the project includes a physical artifact. Furthermore, project complexity is indicated based on project size (cost and number of people involved) and organizational dependencies.

Besides being categorized as product development type of projects, both the Grundfos case and the Siemens Wind Power case can be labeled long-term engineering projects with a high degree of dependencies and physical artifacts. Compared to the other three cases, these two projects also have a higher degree of complexity and did not achieve the intended reduced time to impact. In these two cases it was not possible to speed up the process and for the Grundfos case, the incentive for speeding up was not first in line since it became clear that the department that was to receive the project and continue working on it would not be ready early enough. A speed-up would therefore result in the project being put on hold for a while.

For the IT projects, the Half Double Methodology seems more feasible to implement. These projects both have a shorter time frame and a lower complexity though the Novo Nordisk case in terms of a number of people involved and cost points to a medium level complexity. In terms of speed, these projects clearly benefit from the tighter coordination between the participating departments and the active ownership as part of the impact solution design.

Though we can see different adaptions of the Half Double Methodology related to the project type, the nature of the project cannot be seen as an isolated explanation of differences between the different projects and their achievement of reducing time to impact. Rather these contingency factors are just one set of factors affecting whether a higher speed and thus faster time to impact is achieved. Other factors are organizational priorities, political decisions and organizational context.

Institutional clashes and context

No project is an island (Engwall, 2003) and projects are embedded in the parent organization(s) and/or the wider environmental context (Morris, 2013, pp. 214-228). This can be labeled the institutional context for projects (Morris & Geraldi, 2011), which both constrains and enables actions (Scott 2008) through governance structures, project management standards, portfolio management, organizational and project maturity to mention some elements.

The governance structures put constraints on all pilot projects and especially Grundfos, Siemens Wind Power and Novo Nordisk. Overall portfolio management was the main reason why Grundfos did not reduce time to impact, and for Siemens Wind Power an assessment showed that "*rules, rigidity and standardized practices before the needs of the specific project*" (Siemens Wind Power meeting March 2016) was a prevailing understanding in the project despite the pressure for

changing behavior according to Half Double thinking. If you are embedded in these institutional structures, it could be difficult to break out of the "iron cage" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) as you are controlled by regulative, normative and cognitive institutional pressures (Scott, 2008). Novo Nordisk have similar governance structures to Grundfos and Siemens Wind Power, but the project team managed to work with "*flexible gate meetings*" meaning that although there were specific requirements for passing a gate, it was accepted by the committee to be flexible about the requirements and to accept passing a gate despite lacking specific documentation and activities.

Lantmännen Unibake and GN Audio are smaller and more nimble organizations, where the potential constraints from governance structures were not discussed as a barrier. The GN Audio project is a sales/IT project working with digital marketplaces involving sales, marketing, supply chain and two IT departments even geographically dispersed, but still the attitude from the project owner and project leader was to remove the roadblocks also from governance structures. Finally, Lantmännen Unibake might have benefitted from having a higher project maturity (and thereby governance structures), but they succeeded nevertheless in reducing time to impact.

Our study focuses on the constraints that the institutional context imposes on projects as these are relatively easy to recognize while enablers from the institutional context are more hidden and embedded in the daily practices and routines carried out. Examples of enablers range from product specification methods at Grundfos to standard key performance indicators at Novo Nordisk, which makes part of the project work routinized and thereby more efficient and still co-existent with the Half Double Methodology.

Discussions

This article starts by positioning a central oxymoron in the relationship between project and time: *temporary* organization to deliver *lasting* benefits. Project practitioners deal with consequent tensions arising from this contradiction in their daily practices and decisions, and we as academics have been approaching it in a myriad of ways, including the relationship between projects and the 'standing organizations', and between owners and contractors, as well as the key dimension of time and timing as fundamental cornerstone for projects.

This study sets out with the aim of describing and analyzing an innovative approach to reframe this oxymoron, by focusing project practices more firmly on *accelerating time to benefit* instead of time to delivery: the Project Half Double.

The Half Double Methodology has been developed in collaboration with seven project-based organizations and piloted in parallel in seven projects in Denmark. The leaders of this research and consultancy project have been extremely successful in making a movement out of this intervention. Their events count with over 200 participants, and more than 450 practitioners have 'joined' the community and receive regular updates about the project.

And indeed, most pilot projects decreased time to benefit when compared with similar projects in their respective companies, and met their own ambitious objectives. However, not all projects could speed time to benefit.

Most of the Project Half Double methods and practices implemented fully or partially and differences in terms of their level of implementation did not provide relevant explanations of the differences we observed in terms of the achieved reduction in time to benefit. We cannot know whether they would have been able to speed up the process without the methodology or with

alternative methodologies, but we have seen that the Half Double Methodology appears to be suitable to reduce time to benefit when compared with similar projects in their own organizations. This suggests that project methodology potentially matters to accelerating time to benefit. Therefore, we propose:

> **Proposition 1: Project management methodology contributes to the ability of a project to accelerate time to benefit.**

However, as not all cases achieved the intended results, project methodology practices may contribute, but are not sufficient to accelerate time to benefit. Further comparison between the cases led to four most striking differences between the cases.

First, *valuing speed* appears to be essential in order to speed up the project and its benefit. This statement appears obvious at first sight, but it leads to three implications. First, acceleration does not come without an effort, which is common knowledge in projects; see e.g. the core idea behind the magic/iron triangle. The result therefore empirically validates some of the arguments put forth by Atkinson adding benefits to the triple constraints (Atkinson, 1999)[1].

A second and more subtle implication is that valuing speed can take different forms and is subjective in nature. Our empirical data points to a more strategic and multifaceted understanding of value, beyond e.g. the classic financial benefits of quicker return on investment. It hinges not only on financial 'facts' but on the ability of the project manager and people responsible for the project to persuade stakeholders within the organization of the need for speed.

Third, taken the nature of the intervention, companies have an interest in being seen to have achieved the higher speed by the project management community. Therefore, it may be that the Hawthorne effect could explain part of the success in the implementation of the methodology and its achieved success, that is, change in behavior is not due to the nature of the experiment, but the mere fact that there is an experiment, and practices in projects are being measured and receive increased attention.

Thus, it may be that the results we observe rather can be explained by the Hawthorne effect; that is the fact that there was an intervention, and not the nature of the intervention *per se,* was the key contributing factor to the acceleration.

Thus, acceleration is not a free option and should be a judgment choice about priorities of the project in its context, and we therefore propose:

> **Proposition 2: To accelerate time to benefit, speed needs to be valued.**

The second difference between the cases has been the time in which the methodology has been implemented. Timing matters as definitions at the front end of projects will to some extent shape

[1] Note that unlike the triple constraint there was no clear evidence of the compensatory relationship between the variables. The traditional key argument of the iron triangle is that increasing one of the variables would have an impact on the other variables. On the contrary, the idea behind the Project Half Double Methodology was half the time and double the benefit – which would be the Holy Grail for any project. Our data has been mostly silent about the specific costs incurred in participating in the project, and extra resources were required, moreover, the Danish research funding paid a consultant to help organizations implement the methodology. It would be naïve to consider that the projects achieved double the speed in half the time, with the same budget.

the potential opportunities to accelerate time to benefit. There seems to be a window of opportunity to establish a benefit focused project management approach that closes as the project progresses through its lifecycle. Thus, the methodology appears to be appropriate for new projects, but will potentially yield limited results in in-flight projects:

> **Proposition 3: Late implementation of the Half Double Methodology will diminish the opportunities to accelerate time to benefit.**

Third, there were significant differences in the nature of projects across the different cases and in particular between cases with different acceleration outcomes. The cases that were not able to speed up the project were more complex and longer. This is understandable, as complex projects will have more interdependencies and some 'hard' constraints that cannot be easily accelerated. The benefits are perhaps also more maturely defined, and hence, they are not a key factor jeopardizing the project, as it is the case in e.g. IT projects, which appear to fit well with the Half Double Methodology.

Interestingly though, longer projects which can be more future oriented were the ones that had less focus on speed. We know from product development theory that delivery time of the project matters and can be a source of competitive advantage. We also noted an overall pressure to reduce processes and increase speed, and in longer projects, there is more time to speed things up. This contradiction may be explained by the complexity of the longer projects.

Finally, institutional clashes limited the ability of projects to implement a radically different project methodology. This limitation is to some extent expected and mentioned as a barrier to adopting agile project management methodologies in industry reports (E.C. Conforto, Rebentisch, & Amaral, 2014; VersionOne, 2016).

Thus, in contrast to earlier studies that accept time consuming methods to deliver benefits vs. 'only' pre-defined scope, this study builds on the concept of acceleration of time to benefit as a key approach to dissolving and reframing the relationship between projects and time, without denying relevance of speed and timing in projects.

Conclusion

Accelerating time to benefit is a serious and important challenge for today's organizations. This paper has looked into why some projects achieve benefits faster than others. There are many reasons such as (1) that the incentive for getting value fast is higher in some projects than others, (2) differences in active project ownership, (3) differences in time for introducing Half Double Methodology, (4) the nature of the project where long-term engineering projects are less receptive than shorter term IT projects, and finally (5) the institutional context does play a role where strong governance structures are working against accelerating time to benefit. Understanding the reasons behind the differences is a complex endeavor as there are many factors in play with internal project factors like active project ownership and nature of the project combined with external issues such as organizational priorities, political decisions and governance structures.

The practical implication of this is that it shows what you can obtain by introducing a new methodology and to what extent it is successful in fulfilling goals with the methodology (see also Joslin & Müller, 2016). Many organizations pursue to improve the way they are managing projects and this study gives useful information about which internal and external project factors to consider when considering to replace project methodologies.

Our claims in this study is limited to the five cases and future research may expand on project types and number of projects in order to draw firmer conclusions.

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Appendix A – Coding Summary

Name	Sources	References
Valuing Speed	4	24
Value Creation approach and thinking	5	49
Nature of project	1	1
Institutional clashes	3	17
Enabling context and Implementation of the Half Double Methodology	0	0
Weekly meetings	3	6
Visualization	2	16
Translation and tailoring of HD Methodology	1	4
Too much administration	1	1
Team spirit and cooperation	1	1
Sprint planning	3	12
Rhythm in project	4	17
Resourcing	3	11
Project Organization	1	1
Project leadership	3	12
People before execution model	2	4
Kill complexity	1	3
Iterative development	1	1
Half Double to reduce overtime and stress	1	1
Half Double Methodology in general	2	4
Geographical distance	1	3
Front-loading	1	5
Frequent follow-up with pulse checks	3	26
Customer and stakeholder involvement	4	5
Cross-organizational alignment	1	2
Co-location	4	18
Active project ownership	3	24
Challenges and problems in projects	2	16

Appendix B – Word Frequency Analysis

Word	Length	Count	Percentage (%)	Similar Words
projects	8	1587	006	project, projected, projects
impact	6	495	002	impact, impact', impacted, impacts
teams	5	325	001	team, teams
half	4	299	001	half
double	6	284	001	double, doubled, doubling
meetings	8	242	001	meet, meeting, meetings
plans	5	234	001	plan, plan', planned, planning, plans
timing	6	232	001	time, times, timing
pilot	5	224	001	pilot, pilot'
design	6	177	001	design, designated, designed, designing, designs
2016	4	170	001	2016
works	5	168	001	work, worked, working, works
solution	8	166	001	solution, solutions
key	3	161	001	key
methodology	11	160	001	methodological, methodologies, methodology
weekly	6	143	001	week, weekly, weeks
managing	8	137	000	manage, managed, management, manager, managers, managing
pulse	5	134	000	pulse, pulse'
processes	9	134	000	process, process', processes, processing
owner	5	131	000	owner, owners, owners'

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